

Spike Island

PRESS RELEASE
VERONICA RYAN
ALONG A SPECTRUM
19 May to 5 September 2021



Spike Island presents a major exhibition of new works by British artist Veronica Ryan (b. 1956, Montserrat). Supported by Freelands Foundation through the annual Freelands Award, this is Ryan's largest and most ambitious exhibition in the UK to date.

Veronica Ryan came to prominence in the 1980s with a number of prestigious exhibitions at venues such as Riverside Studios, London (1988) and Kettle's Yard, Cambridge (1989). Best known for her sculpture that is evocative of shapes, forms and objects from the natural world, Ryan's work defies easy categorisation. Over the years, she has experimented with scale, material and technique while remaining focused on the interplay between conflicting opposites: revelation and concealment, container and contained, absence and presence. Her work sits at the intersection between materiality and idea, and enquires into the processes by which objects carry and construct meaning.

Made during an extended residency at Spike Island in Bristol, the works in *Along a Spectrum* examine environmental and socio-political concerns, personal narratives, history and displacement, as well as the wider psychological implications of the current pandemic. Cast forms in clay and bronze lie directly on the gallery floor; sewn and tea-stained fabrics hang loosely from the walls; and bright neon crocheted fishing line pouches filled with a variety of seeds, fruit stones and skins stretch down from the walls and ceiling to the floor. Arrangements of handmade objects lie alongside assortments of fruits and seeds on metal shelving units; contrasting elements that when brought together acquire a symbolic and emotional dimension.

A number of clay works cast from medical foam pillows deepen Ryan's investigation into ideas of recovery, rescue and restoration. Devoid of the



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nurturing qualities that provide comfort to the aching body, these uncannily shaped pillows are placed on the floor or stacked to their tipping point in precarious arrangements. Throughout the exhibition Ryan alludes to earlier works in her processes of making, such as the accumulation and stacking of various food containers, resonating with some of her most emblematic works of the 1990s that were lost in the 2004 fire at the Momart warehouse in east London.

In other works, cocoa pods, soursop and orange skins, drift seeds, mango and avocado stones are cast in clay and bronze or simply left to dry. Fruits, seeds, plants and vegetables are recurring motifs in Ryan's sculpture. They show a concern with where and how plants germinate, what conditions enable them to take root across different environments and how they travel from one location to another. They function metaphorically for Ryan's own sense of dislocation, and more widely they allude to a history of trading across the globe. In Ryan's work, personal experience is often conditioned by a sense of location. An important focus of her research is on the history of Montserrat or Alliouagana – as it was known prior to the arrival of the Europeans – and on trying to identify its early culture. As such, a group of soursop skins has been cast in clay and glazed with volcanic ash from Alliouagana.

Elusive and beguiling, the works in *Along a Spectrum* consider the attachments that we form with the materials and objects around us; hinting at the connections we make between the landscapes of our interior and the exterior worlds.

A new publication accompanies the exhibition, presenting an overview of Ryan's practice from the 1980s to the present day. Designed by Daly & Lyon, it features rarely seen images, a detailed biographical timeline, an interview with Courtney J. Martin and newly commissioned essays by Vanessa Boni, Dorothy Price and Natalie Rudd.

– Ends –

Image: Veronica Ryan, *Pouch* (2020). Net, orange peels, black thread. Works courtesy the artist and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York. Photograph by Max McClure

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ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

- Veronica Ryan (b. 1956, Plymouth, Montserrat) moved to England as an infant and she currently works between New York and the UK. Ryan studied at St. Albans College of Art and Design; Bath Academy of Art in Corsham Court; The Slade School of Art at University College, London, and The School of Oriental and African Studies at London University. Ryan's solo exhibitions include *The Weather Inside*, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York (2019); *Salvage*, The Art House, Wakefield (2017); *The Weather Inside*, The Mattress Factory, Pittsburg (2011); *Archaeology of the Black Sun*, Salena Gallery, Long Island (2005); *Quoit Montserrat*, Tate St Ives, Cornwall (2000); *Compartments/Apartments*, Camden Arts Centre, London and Angel Row, Nottingham (1995), and Arnolfini, Bristol (1987). Her work has been included in group exhibitions at Castlefield Gallery, Manchester; Towner Art Gallery, Eastbourne (2019); Nottingham Contemporary (2017); Henry Moore Institute, Leeds (2009); The Brooklyn Museum, New York (2007); Tate Modern, London (2005); Tate St Ives, Cornwall (1998); Bard



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College, New York (1995); Paula Cooper Gallery, New York (1992); Hayward Gallery, London (1990); Kettle's Yard, Cambridge (1988); Whitechapel Art Gallery, London (1985). Ryan has been the recipient of numerous awards and prizes, including most recently the 2019 Pollock Krasner Grant, the 2018 Freelands Award, and the Hackney Art Windrush Commission (to be unveiled in 2021).

NOTES FOR EDITORS

- In 2018, Freelands Foundation announced Spike Island as the third recipient of the annual £100,000 Freelands Award to present a solo exhibition of new work by Veronica Ryan, in addition to producing a monograph with the distinguished British sculptor. The Freelands Award was established in 2016 by Freelands Foundation, chaired by Elisabeth Murdoch, to enable an arts organisation outside London to present a large-scale exhibition, including a significant new work, by a mid-career female artist who may not have yet received the acclaim or public recognition that her work deserves. www.freelandsfoundation.co.uk
- Spike Island is an international centre for the development of contemporary art and design, located close to Bristol's harbourside. It is a place where artists and the public can meet, enabling audiences to engage with artists' research and production. Within the 80,000 square foot building, Spike Island offers visitors a year-round programme of internationally relevant exhibitions, events and activities, as well as providing working space for artists, designers and creative businesses. The link between the production and presentation of art on this scale and under one roof is unique within the UK. Spike Island's programme emphasises the commissioning of new ambitious work and often provides artists their first significant gallery exhibition in the UK. Spike Island Exhibition Services support the development of commissions, including in-house post production facilities for artists' film and video, audio visual technical services and equipment provision for ambitious moving image installations, on site fabrication workshops, resin rooms, skilled art technicians and fabricators. www.spikeisland.org.uk

